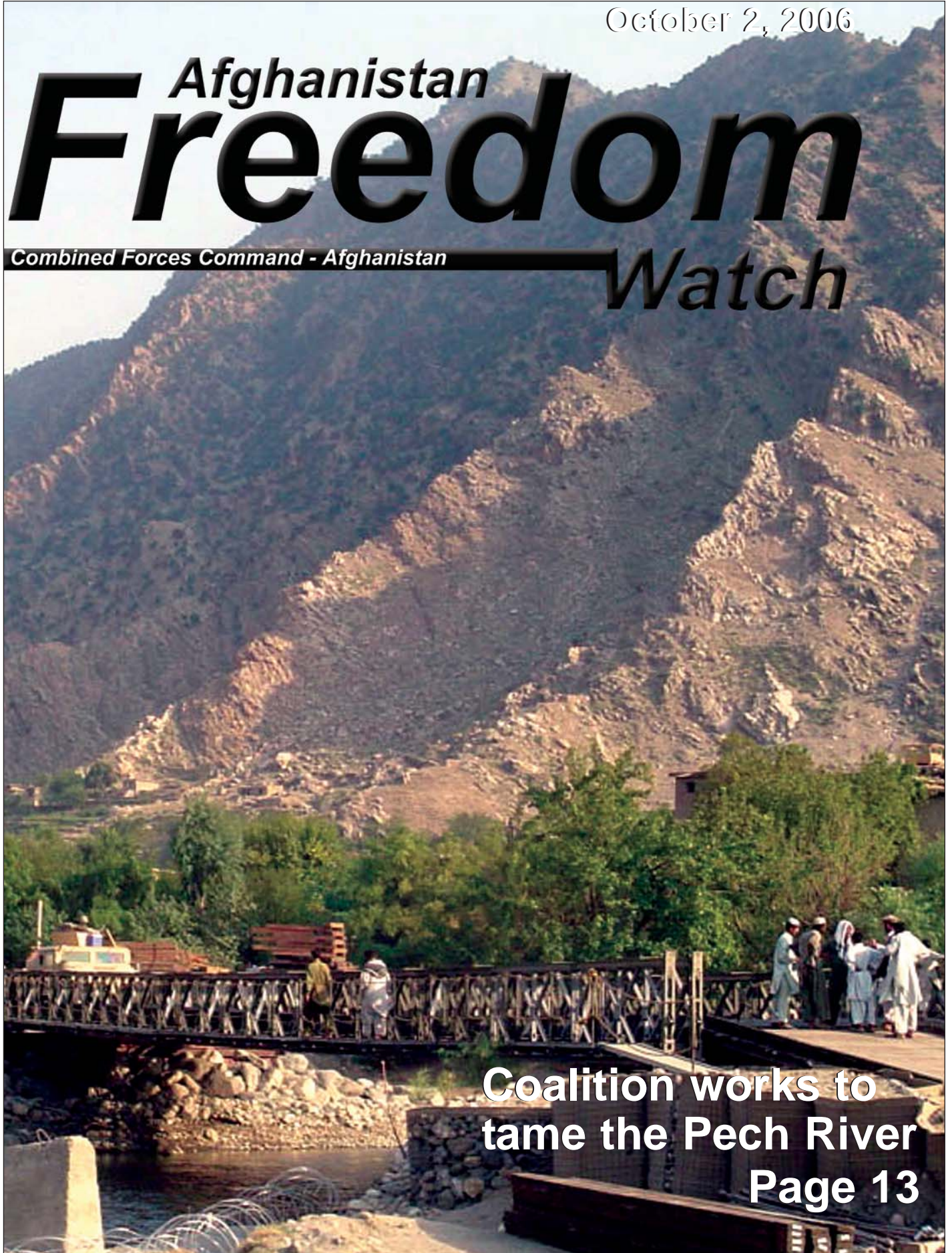


October 2, 2006

Afghanistan **Freedom** *Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan* **Watch**



**Coalition works to
tame the Pech River**
Page 13

Afghan Police Officer Sakina gathers with her students in Kandahar Sept. 14 after they all qualified at the range with their assigned weapons. Sakina is one of three female officers currently working at the police academy in Regional Command South.

Photo by Army Sgt. Mayra Kennedy
345th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



Cover: The 27th Engineer Battalion from Fort Bragg, N.C., spearheaded the building of a Bailey bridge to traverse the treacherous Pech River. The bridge spans 230 feet and is the longest Bailey bridge built under combat operations since World War II, as well as the longest bridge in Afghanistan.

Photo by Army 2nd Lt. Jennifer Hwang
27th Engineering Battalion

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Afghanistan **Freedom** Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan **Watch**

Freedom Watch is a weekly publication of
Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan.

CFC-A Commander Lt. Gen. Karl W. Eikenberry
Public Affairs Officer Col. Thomas Collins

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Click on the *Freedom Watch* link on the homepage to view the *Freedom Watch*.

National hero of Afghanistan remembered

By Army Pfc. Michael J. Nyeste
19th Public Affairs Detachment

PANJSHIR VALLEY, Afghanistan --

Afghan government officials, U.S. military leaders, NATO representatives, foreign dignitaries and thousands of Afghans gathered at the tomb of Ahmed Sha Massoud in the Panjshir Province on September 10.

The thousands who gathered in front of the tomb of the man who led the fight against the Soviets and the Taliban regime came to remember "The National Hero of Afghanistan" almost five years to the day of Massoud's assassination.

"Al Quaida and the Taliban want to make Afghanistan a safe house for violence and terrorism," said Ahmad Zia Massoud, the first deputy vice president of Afghanistan and brother of Ahmed Sha Massoud. "We should stand against them for our freedoms."

The memorial ceremony began with high ranking Coalition forces, NATO, Afghan government officials and numerous Afghans passing through Massoud's tomb, which is currently under construction.

The officials then gathered in a building near the tomb while thousands of people took their seats and others continued to pay their respects in the tomb.

Minutes later, a series of speeches were



Photo by Army Pfc. Michael J. Nyeste

Thousands of Afghans listen to a speech by Ahmed Zia Massoud, the vice president of Afghanistan, about his brother's legacy and lasting influence.

given to the audience of Massoud's former followers.

"We must follow the way of Massoud. He saw an Afghanistan that was united and not divided into many factions," said Ahmed Zia Massoud.

In addition to the speeches given, prayers were spoken, choirs sang songs about Massoud's legacy and other Afghans

showed their pride in their former leader by waving flags and banners.

"I was very impressed with the Afghan unity I saw here today," said Maj. Gen. Benjamin Freakley, commander, Combined Joint Task Force-76. "Massoud would have enjoyed seeing this because he was more interested in being an Afghan than a Tajik."

Dari/Pashtu phrase of the week



Afghan cultural tidbit

Photo by Army Spc. James Tamez, 19th Public Affairs Detachment

Happy Ramadan

Dari

Mahe-Ramadan-e-tan Mubarak
(Mah-hey Rom-eh-don-eh-than
Moo-bah-rack)

Pashtu

Ramadan my Mubarak Sha
(Rom-eh-don moo Moo-bah-rack
Shah))

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. It is during this month that Muslims observe the Fast of Ramadan. Lasting for the entire month, Muslims fast during the daylight hours and in the evening eat small meals and visit with friends and family. Traditionally, it is a time of worship and contemplation, and a time to strengthen family and community ties.

Afghan woman teaches at ANP academy

**By Army Sgt.
Mayra Kennedy
345th Mobile Public Affairs
Detachment**

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan -- The Afghan National Police is currently conducting a recruiting campaign where Afghan men and women are invited to join the force, and without hesitation, one young woman stepped up to become a police officer.

"When I was a young girl, I used to watch cop movies and I always wanted to be one," said Sakina, a 24-year old police officer who works at the ANP training academy's headquarters in Kandahar.

She joined the police academy six months ago and impressed everyone there with her shooting skills. To her, this was more than just a job. It was a career and a dream come true.

"Training wasn't too difficult

for an Afghan woman, but I found the drills hard because all instructions were given in Pashtu and I speak Dari," she said.

Even though there are many similarities between the two languages, Sakina explained that distinguishing between some words like right and left, was a challenge.

"I just couldn't remember one from the other," she said.

With Sakina's determination, she was able to receive a badge and her first assignment as a weapons instructor at the academy where she currently teaches 32 new trainees.

"I enjoy teaching all these students at the academy," she said. "Other women can't believe that I work here because 99 percent are males. They can't believe that I actually teach men how to become police. They all treat me like I'm their daughter or sister."

But Sakina is a police officer,

just like any other.

Her training schedule Sept. 14 was dedicated to weapons qualification at the range. Prior to the range, students must attend all lectures regarding technique, posture, parts and function of the rifle.

The second portion of this training included going to the range and using what they learned in a practical exercise.

Like any instructor, Sakina provides individual training to each of her students. The purpose is to have them feel comfortable with their weapon and qualify at the range.

At the qualifying range, Sakina wears her uniform, burka and hearing protection. With her exceptional teaching skills, trainees are able to meet the requirements with their weapons.

Naqeeb Ullah is also a weapons instructor and police officer who works hand-in-hand with Sakina since she first

joined the ANP.

"When she came here for training she had very high scores, so we decided to hire her to be one of the instructors," said Ullah. "She is a hard working police officer."

He said that the ANP needs more women like Sakina to help them make a better police department.

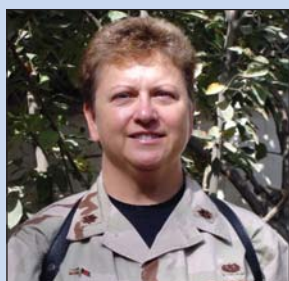
"I'm going to be here permanently unless my boss gives me another assignment or if I'm needed somewhere else," said Sakina about her future in the police force.

Many neighbors in her community are surprised to see Sakina wear a uniform every day to work, but they accept her and are very proud of her.

The future of Afghanistan not only involves the government, but also its residents, including Afghan women. Sakina is an example of how women can and are helping shape this country.

Enduring Voices

What is one tip you will pass on to your successor?



**Air Force Maj.
Celeste Gamache**

Camp Eggers

"Have a good attitude and look at every day as an adventure."



**Navy Lt. Cdr.
Richard Froderman**

Camp Eggers

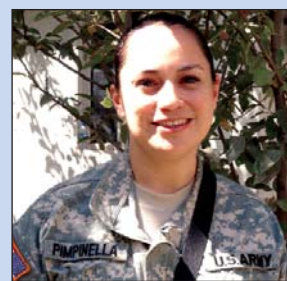
"Understand the history of Afghanistan tribal relationships and how the provinces interact."



**Air Force Master Sgt.
Chris Miller**

Camp Eggers

"Enjoy their time here. Get involved in activities and do the best job possible."



**Army Staff Sgt.
Karina Pimpinella**

Camp Eggers

"To be very patient here and be very open minded. Don't be complacent at any time. Your life and the lives of others depend on it!"

Azizi Bank works to pay ANP salaries

By Army 1st Lt.
Melissa J. Stevens
Jalalabad PRT Public Affairs

JALALABAD, Afghanistan - Members of the Afghan National Police are finding out what it means to have their salaries paid to them in full and on time.

Working with Da Afghanistan Bank, the Afghan owned and operated Azizi Bank has started setting up bank accounts for each of the nearly 3,000 policemen in Nangarhar Province to ensure they receive their complete salaries at a fixed time and for the accurate amount.

The Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Interior, DynCorp and the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan have formed a partnership to change the entire process, said Army Col. Curt Rauhut, the chief of the Finance Transition Team for CSTC-A.

"This is a huge accomplishment that is guiding trust into



Photo by Army 1st Lt. Melissa J. Stevens
Afghan National Police Col. Abdul Samad, the finance director for Nangarhar PHQ, discusses the new payroll system with policemen from ANP at the PHQ in Jalalabad.



Photo by Army 1st Lt. Melissa J. Stevens, Jalalabad PRT

Policemen from the Afghan National Police line up Aug. 22 at the Nangarhar Provincial Police Headquarters compound to receive their salaries from tellers representing Azizi Bank, an Afghan-owned and operated commercial bank.

the commercial banking system," Rauhut said. "Everyone knows that for the past two to four years there's been a lot of skimming from the top on police payroll. Now this is guaranteeing 100 percent accurate payroll to the soldiers directly."

He said the system was broken and it had to be changed.

"Now it's using both the national bank and a commercial bank who are chartered, bonded and trusted agents," Rauhut said. "They stand to lose the charter if things go wrong."

The system is a three-phase process that begins with individual salary payments using a centralized location to pay soldiers. It begins the verification of identity and bank account registration process.

The second phase uses the registration and verification list

to pay soldiers.

The third phase is dependent on the success of the commercial bank system and will send complete salaries to the soldiers' individual bank accounts at a set time each month.

Rauhut said 25 of the 34 provinces in Afghanistan should be implementing at least one of the three phases by December.

"A lot of people believe that stability and security in the country will come from the police," he said. "If they aren't getting paid what they are due, we won't have good security."

Abdul Ha, an officer with the Criminal Investigation Department at the Nangarhar Police Headquarters, said that the policemen were doing a good job. If the momentum of ensuring salaries are paid in a timely manner continues, they will do even better.

Afghan National Police Col. Abdul Samad, the finance director for the PHQ, said he was very pleased with the new system.

"This is a wonderful thing that Afghanistan is doing. It will make all of the soldiers here happy and their paychecks will go more smoothly," Samad said. "This program will be better and will have better advantages. It will make everyone happy because they will be responsible for their own salaries."

Mr. Masehallah, the Azizi Bank Jalalabad Branch Manager, said that before this new process, soldiers were not sure about the security of their money.

"We're helping the people, the government, non-governmental organizations and the salary system," Masehallah said.

Catamount Soldiers recognized for actions in combat

By Army Sgt.

Amber Robinson

Task Force Spartan Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE ORGUN-E, Afghanistan--Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Spartan, gathered in Task Force Catamount area of operations Sept. 2 to honor the heroes of the battalion in an award ceremony.

Awards were presented by 10th Mountain Division and Task Force Spartan leaders at Forward Operating Bases Orgun-E, Tillman and Bermel.

"I have called on the Catamounts time and again," said Army Maj. Gen. Benjamin Freakley, Combined Joint Task Force-76 commander. "Every time, the Soldiers have risen to the occasion with valor."

Army Pfc. Jerry Evans, Alpha Company, 2-87 Inf., a turret gunner for his platoon, was wounded early in his deployment. He received the Army Commendation Medal for Valor and Purple Heart for his injuries.

"I received shrapnel in my hand at first," said Evans, in a quiet southern drawl. "That's why they wanted to give me the valorous award because I kept firing my weapon after I was hit. I was scared, no doubt, but my training kicked in quickly and I realized that I had four other people in my Humvee I had a responsibility to protect. I just did what I was trained to do."

Evans did not relinquish his position in the turret until he received shrapnel in his face. He was hit in the hand, the right cheek and on the line



Photo by Army Sgt. Amber Robinson

Army Spc. Jared Angell, 2-87, Alpha company medic, and Staff Sgt. Josue Rodriguez, a mortar man with A Co., 2-87 Inf., sing the Army song during an awards ceremony attended by 10th Mountain Division and Task Force Spartan leaders.

of his left jaw.

"It meant a lot for the commanding general to come out and present us with our awards," said Evans, stationed at FOB Tillman, near the Pakistan border. "I had a strong sense of pride, not just for myself and my country, but for my friends and family."

Evans has 1 year-old son, Brandon.

"One day I guess I can tell him what we did over here, and he can feel that sense of pride as well," said Evans, from Eufala, Ala.

This was one of the handful of the stories Army Lt. Col. Christopher Toner, 2-87 Inf. commander, refers to as "Catamount miracles."

Army Cpl. Channing Moss, assigned to A Co., 2-87 Inf., served as a turret gunner until March 16, when his platoon

came under small arms fire while on a routine combat patrol near FOB Tillman. During the course of the skirmish, Moss was wounded by rocket fire.

"Spc. Jared Angell, the medic on patrol with the platoon at the time, was the first to treat Moss immediately after he was hit," said Army Sgt. 1st Class Conway Halladay, Catamount medical platoon sergeant. "His initial actions are what ultimately saved Moss's life."

Angell, well suited in his name, was pinned with the Army Commendation Medal for Valor. Moss is currently recovering stateside at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Washington, D.C.

"To be able to help out in a situation such as this and then see his recovery afterward is astonishing," said Halladay,

who also received the Army Commendation Medal for Valor. "It's amazing to be able to assist in saving a life."

Awards presented were two Army Commendation Medals for Valor, Combat Infantry Badge and the Combat Action Badge. Each medal for valor was presented personally by Freakley and each combat badge presented by Toner.

"It means a lot to the troops to have the commanding general come and personally hand out the awards," Toner said. "It means a lot to the general as well. He would have it no other way. It is critical to the Soldiers' morale to see the leadership of their division and their brigade genuinely cares for them. These guys are out there putting it on the line each day for their country and the Afghan people."

Civil affairs battalion hosts bid conference in Kandahar

By Army Sgt.
Mayra Kennedy
345th Mobile Public Affairs
Detachment

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – The 405th Civil Affairs Battalion team hosted a bid conference recently to gain support from local contractors during Operation Medusa, which attempts to push out enemy extremists and bring prosperity to villages in Kandahar.

Army Lt. Col. Raleigh Jones, 405th CA advisor, currently works with the contractors to help on the development of Regional Command South.

Jones explained that every effort has been made to make the Panjawayi area and others in Kandahar province clear of extremists.

“The operation (Medusa) already began and we will clear all strong points and all large areas where the enemy is holding up,” said Jones, from Anderson, S.C.

Army Staff Sgt. Albert Beyer, project purchasing officer, conducted the briefing in hopes to get all future projects started immediately.

“Locals haven’t been able to stay in their villages because of the Taliban,” said Beyer, from Layton, Utah. “This repatriation plan is so that they can come back home. Keep in mind that you are helping your fellow villagers.”

The CA team is currently working on building and rebuilding schools, clinics and wells in several areas in RCS. In addition, a humanitarian aid campaign will also be established to assist local villagers who return to abandoned areas.



Photo by Army Sgt. Mayra Kennedy

Officials from the 405th Civil Affairs Battalion brief local contractors from Kandahar city on security needs for each project and how it should be calculated into all bids.

Beyer explained to the contractors that all food products, materials and sub-contractors helping their companies must be Kandahar residents or residents of the area in which the projects are taking place.

“There is a short time peri-

od to complete some of these projects,” he said. “Quality is very important, so don’t neglect your projects.”

Humanitarian aid will include providing rice, beans, sugar and many more basic food items difficult for locals to

obtain.

According to the CA team, in RCS alone, a total of 200 projects have been initiated in the region. In the Kandahar province alone, nearly 10 projects will be initiated next month.



Photo by Army Spc. James Tamez

Robotic Repair Facility provides winning

By Army Spc. James Tamez
19th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - U.S. Army and civilian personnel at the Joint Robotic Repair Facility are providing top level robotic services to military units using unmanned ground robots here.

In their minds, the job is simple. Provide the war fighters with the best possible service and ensure that their robotics needs are met quickly and efficiently.

"We provide the sustainment, assessment, accountability and training for all unmanned ground robots," said Army Capt. Jimmy Hunt, officer

in charge, joint robotic repair facility. "Anything for unmanned ground robots goes through us."

The robots run many missions, including scouting missions for convoys and detonating IEDs, Hunt said. This repair facility is the only one in Afghanistan, Hunt said, and is tasked by Army Material Command to provide the depot level services for the robots here.

"This shop is really functioning as a repair facility, with the customer services deployed Soldiers want," said Master Sgt. Marie Salinas, noncommissioned officer in charge, JRRF. "If we can't fix the robot in four hours, we will get a new robot to the unit."

The technicians at JRRF are excellent. When fielding the units, they ensure the units are ready to go.

The staff here can build a damaged track up, which is a huge task. Replacing the robot costs \$130,000 dollars, but the money isn't the work that is done.

"This job is a place an expensive way while taking an irreplaceable, out of the unit," Hunt said.

The technicians at JRRF repairs for 10 to 15 robots a day.



Darryl Crowder, Army Master Sgt. Marie Salinas, and Army Staff Sgt. Kelly Taylor check the optics on a robot. Crowder is a civilian contractor with AMC, Salinas is NCOIC of JRRF, and Taylor is a robotics technician.

ning edge to warfighters

icians working at the excellent, Salinas said. ing the equipment, they nits receive it properly. here is excellent, and damaged robot from the hich saves money. e robots can cost up to lars, Hunt said. But he only thing saved by t is done. is critical because it endable item into harms king Soldiers, who are , out of harms way," icians are providing 0 to 15 robots a week,

Hunt said. There are eight different varieties of robots in the operational area and, by the end of the year, there will be over 400 robots. The staff is constantly working to ensure the best possible product, Salinas said. This includes accepting recommendations from the war fighters for improvements. Those recommendations are forwarded to the manufacturers. This also includes providing training on existing and new robots making their way into the operational area. "As the need for robotics on the battlefield increases, our need will grow for handlers and maintainers," Hunt said.



Photo by Robert Canfield

The Marcbot IV is one of several robots used in Afghanistan by Coalition personnel. This robot is maintained, repaired and fielded by the personnel at the JRRF.



Photo by Army Spc. James Tamez

on a damaged robot. Crowder



Photo by Army Spc. James Tamez

(Above) Darryl Crowder and Army Master Sgt. Marie Salinas look over a power supply to a damaged robot. Crowder is a logistics assist representative for Army Material Command and Salinas is NCOIC of the Joint Robotics Repair Facility.



Photo by Air Force Maj. David Kurle, 455th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

A C-130 Hercules from the 156th Airlift Wing, Puerto Rico Air National Guard, with 39 Guardsmen arrives here Sept. 8. This is the first time the 156th has deployed to a combat zone. They will support Operation Enduring Freedom with aircraft, aircrews and maintenance personnel for the next four months.

Puerto Rico ANG deploys to war zone for first time in history

By Air Force Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.
455th Air Expeditionary Wing

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- The Puerto Rico Air National Guard deployed here Sept. 8 – the first time in a war zone in its 55-year history.

Although a few of the members have been deployed to other regions of the world, such as a joint-force deployment to Bosnia, they have never deployed as a unit to a war zone until now.

“This is history for us,” said Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Wilford Palmer, 156th Airlift Wing aircraft maintenance production supervisor. “This is an adventure because none of us has ever been here before.”

The chief said when the unit asked for volunteers for this war-time deployment, they received so many they had to restrict the deployments to one-month for most of them

so they could give everyone a chance to serve in Operation Enduring Freedom.

“We still have people at home who want to be here,” Palmer said. “They want to be part of the freedom fighters, to be part of liberating Afghanistan and Iraq to spread democracy.”

Although their members will be rotating out every 30 days, the unit is committed to its 120-day deployment.

“Our goal is to make this a better country and spread democracy, and that’s inspirational to me,” said Air Force Master Sgt. Robin Santana, a C-130 Hercules avionics guidance control technician. “I volunteered to serve my country and do my part.”

Eight years ago, the unit flew F-16 Fighting Falcons. Now they fly the Herc.

“The switch was tough,” Palmer said. “Our unit had always been a fighter-oriented unit. Switching to the heavy community was a big change.

But we adapted and learned that the C-130 mission is an excellent mission. We’re relevant and ready to go.”

The 68 members who deployed received a hero’s send off nine days ago when they left after getting interviewed by three newspapers and one television news crew. Even a sen-

ator was on hand to bid them farewell.

The trip from Puerto Rico to here took seven days because of mechanical problems in Greece.

“We have always wanted to get involved for a long time and now we’re getting the chance,” the chief said.



Air Force Lt. Col. Jeff Alexander, 455th Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron commander, addresses members of the Puerto Rico Air National Guard in the C-130 maintenance clam shell Sept. 9.

One day a PRT Airman will never forget

By Air Force Maj.

David Kurle

455th Air Expeditionary Wing
Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- Air Force Staff Sgt. Mike Myers experienced one of the most frightening events of his life in Afghanistan, while one of the greatest was taking place more than 7,000 miles away, almost simultaneously.

Myers, a security forces member of one of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams here, is lucky to be alive after his Humvee was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade Sept. 6.

He received news, later that day, about the birth of his second child – a son, who was born at almost the same moment he was under attack.

“His name is Jackson William Shane Myers,” he wrote later that day. “(He) looks just like me and has red hair like his mom. I am very glad he is able to have a dad.”

Myers, deployed here from Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas, knew his wife was going to have an induced labor the night of Sept. 5. What he didn't know was how the labor was progressing as he donned his body armor, helmet and rifle and strapped himself in the driver's seat for the PRT's mission the next morning.

“You know how labor goes,” he said. “You never know what's going to happen. I was hoping my wife and son were okay and nothing was wrong with either of them.”

The PRT's mission that day was to conduct assessments on projects the team was supervising a bridge under construction, a new road and newly-dug water well in a nearby



Photo by Air Force Maj. David Kurle

Staff Sgt. Mike Myers peers through the broken windshield of a HUMVEE he drove 15 kilometers after it was hit by a rocket propelled grenade in Afghanistan's Kapisa Province. The attack came just as his son was born in the U.S.

province.

The convoy also stopped at two Afghan National Police stations so Myers could do his job of mentoring the province's ANP.

“Basically, I assess their security capabilities and determine how well they do their job,” he said.

The job of the six Air Force-led PRTs in Afghanistan is to promote good governance in the country's provinces and to facilitate the re-building of infrastructure and education systems.

While traveling in a convoy of armored Humvees after taking a look at the well-digging project, the team rounded a spur in the mountains on a gravel road when Sergeant Myers heard gun fire.

“My gunner said, ‘contact left – go, go, go,’” he said. “As (the

gunner) was shooting, he yelled ‘RPG, RPG.’”

A rocket-propelled grenade had been shot at the convoy but missed. After re-grouping in a village, the PRT vehicles set out again.

“Luckily, there were no casualties,” Myers said. “We then pulled out of the village where another ambush was set up for us. As soon as our vehicle cleared a building on the right, we were hit.”

The sergeant's Humvee, with four other passengers, was hit by a rocket propelled grenade that turned the windshield's bullet-proof glass into a lattice-work of cracks and jammed the dashboard against the steering wheel.

“I spit glass out of my mouth and then just gunned it,” Myers said. “As I was driving away, I thought that my new

son and daughter wouldn't have a father and my wife would be a widow.”

Myers said he drove the crippled Humvee another 15 kilometers before the team stopped to re-group again, the whole time peering through a 3-inch area of clear glass in the windshield to see where he was going. He didn't know until they were stopped that the Humvee also had a flat tire.

The staff sergeant credits the Humvee's armor, his training, as well as his personal safety and protective gear for keeping him from even getting a scratch.

“The Kevlar helmet saved my head and neck, my ballistic glasses saved my eyes and my vest had glass shards all over it,” he said. “I honestly, truly believe that the training we've had – no doubt – got us through this.”

He also said that God was watching out for him and everyone in the convoy during those first moments of his son's new life. Not one person was injured.

After the mission, Myers called his wife to get news about the birth.

“I was thinking about how I was going to tell her about the day Jackson was born because I knew she was going to ask,” he said. Opting for honesty, he told her everything.

Myers said he believes the mission of the PRT is worth the risk and they are there to help rebuild the government of Afghanistan.

“I'm hoping that everything I tell my son about Afghanistan makes him more proud to be an American and he will stand up and defend his country when the time comes,” he said.

Operation Iron Rage disrupts Taliban in Ghazni

By Army Sgt. Tim Sander
345th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE GHAZNI, Afghanistan -- As the sun slowly lowered itself beneath the massive mountains to the west, the mercury in the thermometer fell with it. The Soldiers who would be occupying this barren hilltop for the next four nights quickly unrolled their sleeping-bags onto the rocky terrain and climbed inside for shelter.

Silence fell across the camp as stars began to decorate the sky. The Soldiers knew that when the sun made its steady climb over the rugged mountain peaks tomorrow, day two of Operation Iron Rage would be in full swing in the isolated region surrounding Ghazni.

Operation Iron Rage, a five-day sub-operation of Operation Mountain Fury, was aimed at defeating enemy forces in Ghazni Province.

The operation took place between Aug. 29 and Sept. 3 and was led by members of the Connecticut National Guard's 1st of the 102nd Infantry division, also known as Task Force Iron Gray.

Other forces participating in the operation included the 2nd Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade, 10th Mountain Division from Fort Polk, La.; 4th Battalion, 25th Field Artillery

Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division from Fort Drum, N.Y.; members of the Afghan National Army; and an embedded training team of National Guard combat veterans responsible for training and advising the ANA during the operation.

The only enemy forces encountered during the operation were ousted by the ETT of Task Force War Eagle and ANA Soldiers after members of a nearby village tipped them off.

"In the first few villages we visited, they all pointed to the same mountain: Tandghar," said Army Capt. Benjamin Tupper, an embedded trainer for the ANA from Syracuse, N.Y. The combined ETT and ANA force was told that the Taliban used the top of the mountain as a camp during the nights.

Although the combined force didn't expect any enemy fighters to be present, they split their resources to better react if they did encounter resistance.

Tupper and eight others began to ascend the rugged terrain while the remainder of the force stayed with the vehicles half-way up the mountain to operate the crew-served weapons.

According to Tupper, the ANA reached the top first and, to his surprise, immediately began firing their AK-47 rifles. By that time, the enemy fighters were already



Army Capt. Benjamin Tupper watches a suspicious person through his binoculars during Operation Iron Rage. Operation Iron Rage, a five-day sub-operation of Operation Mountain Fury, was aimed at defeating enemy forces in Ghazni Province.

making a hasty descent and disappearing into compounds at the base of the mountain.

"It has been our experience that when Taliban fighters get into compounds, they are very hard to find because they blend in," said Tupper.

At the summit of the rocky peak was a well-developed Taliban camp, said Tupper. He said there were "at least 15 to 20 well constructed, stone fighting positions, a meeting area, a sleeping area and a cooking area."

After a call to Iron Gray headquarters, the decision was made to withdraw from the mountain and destroy the camp using 105mm Howitzers and Apache attack helicopters.

As the day winded down, the ETT and ANA descended the mountain and set up a perimeter to keep civilians away as the 4-25th FA bombarded the camp with artillery to ensure that it would no longer be used as a safe haven for terrorists.



Photo by Army Sgt. Tim Sander

A Soldier from the 4th Battalion, 25th Field Artillery Regiment, 10th Mountain Division from Fort Drum, N.Y., performs routine maintenance on a 105mm Howitzer during Operation Iron Rage.

Engineering Battalion tames the Pech River in Korengal

**By Army 2nd Lt.
Jennifer Hwang
27th Engineering Battalion**

CAMP BLESSING, Afghanistan -- The 27th Engineer Battalion from Fort Bragg, N.C., made history recently spearheading the monumental effort in building a Bailey bridge to traverse the treacherous Pech River.

The bridge spans 230 feet, making it the longest Bailey bridge built under combat operations since World War II, as well as the longest bridge in Afghanistan.

The bridge will connect the Korengal Valley and the Pech Valley, areas previously inaccessible to each other by vehicle. The Pech River can be crossed only six to eight months out of the year. During the rainy season, the entire Korengal Valley is landlocked.

The Bailey bridge is a standard military bridge first designed in 1941, consisting of standardized components and sections that can be arranged into different lengths and configurations to suit a specific site.

The Pech River Bridge will be wide enough for a single lane of vehicular traffic with foot paths on either side. The bridge will support regularly expected traffic of Humvees, five-ton cargo trucks and commercial trucks.

Construction on the bridge started in August and was estimated to be complete at the end of September. However, soldiers of the 27th Engineer Battalion surpassed all expectations and completed the bridge three weeks ahead of schedule.

It cost \$2.2 million for just the bridge parts themselves, an extra \$1.5 million to fly the parts in from Italy and another \$215,000 for local national contracting and labor.

The bridge is planned to stay in place for approximately two years until the Provincial Reconstruction Team completes a permanent bridge at an adjacent site.

For local residents, the bridge will provide a reliable and safe thoroughfare for economic goods and other supplies essential to the strengthening of the infrastructure of the area.

For example, plans for building a new



Photo by Army 2nd Lt. Jennifer Hwang

The 27th Engineer Battalion from Fort Bragg, N.C., made history recently in spearheading the building of a Bailey bridge across the Pech River.

school in the Korengal Valley can finally come to fruition once the bridge is in place and heavy construction materials can be transported across the river.

"We are helping the locals and they are quite happy we are building the bridge for them," said Spc. Rebecca Baker, one of the technical engineer specialists on site from Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

Construction has been a team effort between local national contractors and laborers, Afghan National Army, the 1-32 Infantry Battalion and the 27th Engineer Battalion.

"We work hand-in-hand with the engineers here. We help each other out a lot," said Army 1st Lt. Michael Harrison, platoon leader of Delta Company, 1-32 Inf. "We also work with the ANA a lot. The ANA soldiers can catch nuances in local national behavior that we often don't notice."

Army Master Sgt. David Roman,

appointed subject matter expert of the bridge construction from Holland Patent, N.Y., noted that re-supply to this remote area has been extremely difficult.

"Because we have been using more resources than initially expected, it has been a continuous logistical strain and team effort," said the non-commissioned officer in charge of plans and operations for the 27th.

A team of 25 local workers built the bridge foundations and abutments using contractor provided equipment and materials. Alpha Company, 1-32 Inf. soldiers supervise and provide their expertise to the project.

"It is good to have so much local national involvement in the construction because they will be the ones responsible for the maintenance," said Army Sgt. Telly Strayhorn, acting platoon sergeant for A. Co, 1-32 Inf. "The Afghans are good workers. They do their best."



Photos by Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael Pintagro

Army Sgt. Sharon Griffin, who serves with a Task Force Spartan security section, guards an approach to her position in the Andar District of Ghazni Province during Operation Mountain Fury.

Coalition routes militant cells in Ghazni

**By Army Sgt. 1st Class
Michael Pintagro**

Task Force Spartan public affairs

**FORWARD OPERATING BASE
GHAZNI, Afghanistan** – Allied forces serving in the Andar District of Ghazni Province dealt Taliban and foreign fighters a string of sharp defeats as the main effort of Operation Mountain Fury continued.

Afghan National Army Soldiers from the 203rd ANA Corps, along with Connecticut National Guardsmen from Task Force Iron Gray, scattered militants operating in Andar, inflicting heavy casualties along the way as allied forces progressed through Ghazni Province.

Infantrymen and field artillerymen from Task Force Spartan fought alongside the Iron Grays and ANA “Thunder

Corps” Soldiers in the joint, combined operation.

“We’ve defeated several enemy cells,” said Army Maj. Todd Reichert, the Task Force Spartan intelligence officer. “The enemy has to react to American and Afghan forces of an extent he hasn’t seen before.”

“I think the Afghan people see through the blatant fraud of ‘jihadists’ who murder good Muslims and finance their terror campaigns through drug money and extortion”

*Army Col. John Nicholson
Task Force Spartan commander*

“I think we have the initiative,” added Army Lt. Col. Todd Brown, a foreign area officer attached to the Spartan staff. “The enemy is being forced to react to our actions on the battlefield.”

As Coalition Soldiers pressed their advantage in Andar, several militant cells gave way. Large swaths of southern and central Ghazni Province, described as ungovernable as recently as late August, embraced the allies and the re-emerging provincial government.

Task Force Iron Gray’s Command Sgt. Maj. David Warner attributed the Taliban’s relative strength in Ghazni Province to its intimidation of poor, isolated and often uneducated farmers, ranchers and shepherds.

“When the Taliban comes in with AK-

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47s and demands rice and water, who are they to say no?” Warner asked rhetorically. “If the government were stronger in these remote areas, the Taliban wouldn’t come and wouldn’t find themselves welcome if they did. That’s why we’re working to strengthen the local government.”

The sergeant major expressed confidence in the skill, tenacity and iron resolve of his Connecticut Guardsmen.

“When Task Force Iron Gray confronts the enemy we carry the battle,” he said flatly. “The hard part is bringing (enemy fighters) to battle. They usually flee to another area.”

Army Col. John Nicholson, the Task Force Spartan commander, praised the courage and determination of his Soldiers and ANA colleagues. He also cast doubt on the strength and popularity of Taliban militants even in one of their putative heartlands.

“The Taliban fighters and their foreign supporters seem to fare a lot better against defenseless farmers and shepherds than they do against Afghan and American Soldiers,” Nicholson said. “It would seem the militants down here ran into some guys they couldn’t bully.”

Nicholson said he “fully expects” the people of Ghazni Province to embrace the government of Afghanistan absent the threats of violence and expropriation.

“When given a chance to decide for themselves, the people of Andar and the whole province choose the government every time,” he said. “The popularity of the Taliban seems based mainly on night letters, explosives and AK-47s. I think the Afghan people see through the blatant fraud of ‘jihadists’ who murder good Muslims and finance their terror campaigns through drug money and extortion.”



Photos by Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael Pintagro

Army Maj. Brian Hirschey, the Task Force Spartan fire and effects coordinator, hustles through a wadi in the Andar District of Ghazni Province during Operation Mountain Fury.

Freedom Watch

October 2, 2006

"Our policy was always to have a good and friendly relations with everyone. But we never have accepted being oppressed and we will never accept it."

-Ahmad Shaah Massoud

Thousands of Afghan citizens gathered in Panjshir valley to mark the anniversary of the murder of Ahmad Shaah Massoud outside the shrine built over his tomb. Photo by Army Michael J. Nyeste, 19th Public Affairs Detachment